Arts Review

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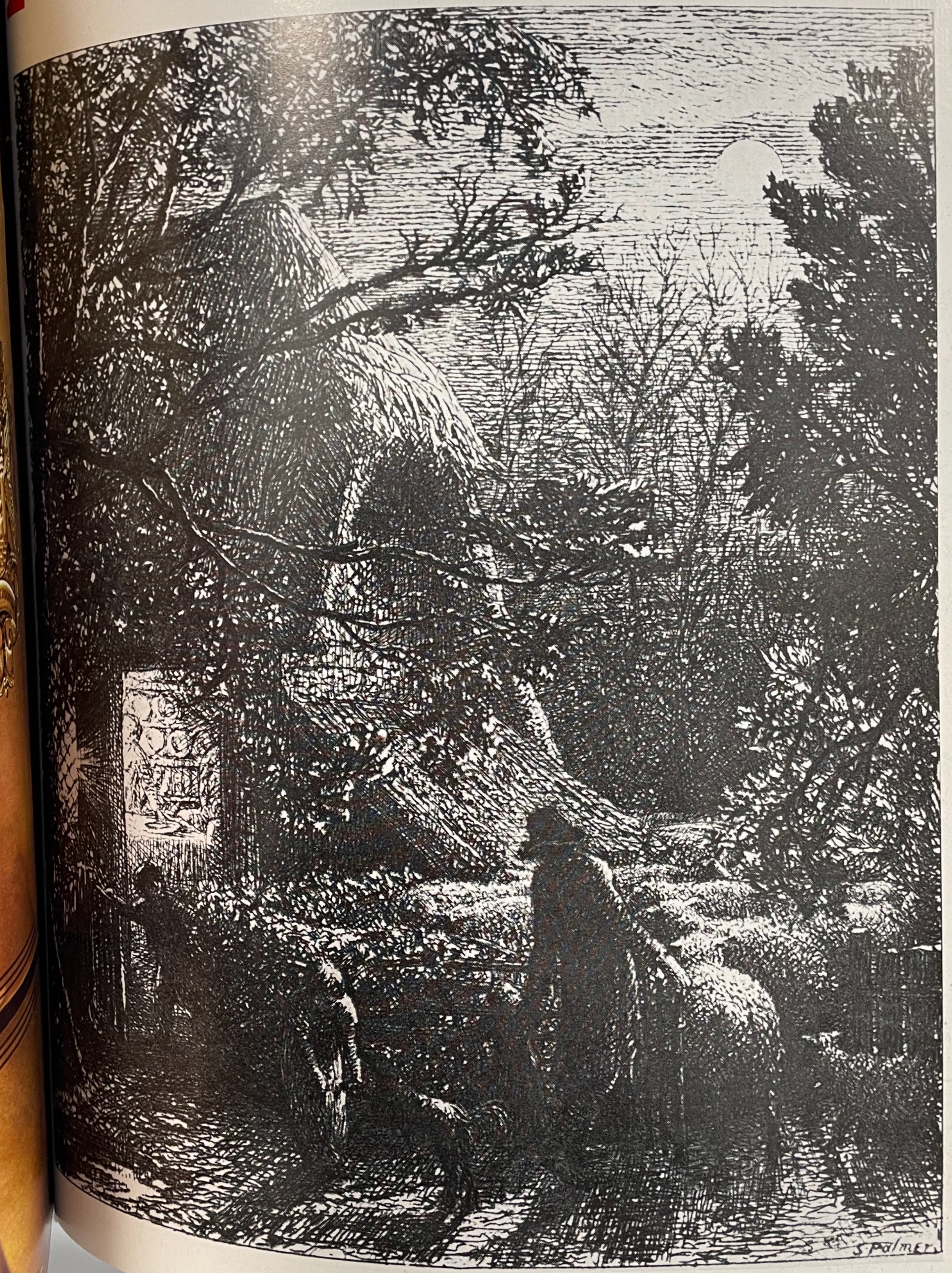


Regional Reviews

Agnes Denes – Work 1968-1978 *Ikon Gallery, Birmingham* Agnes Denes is a scientific artist. The shapes which emerge from the numerical sequences she describes in ink on graph paper look very beautiful. Whether they may be accepted as works of art raises some doubts, for scientific datum, visually realised, often has a kind of majesty but it is rarely seen on gallery walls. Denes claims that as an artist she conducts dialogues with many disciplines – psychology, crystallography, theology, with the science of map projections. This all sounds rather portentous. The results range from her four impressive large works to the small *Egg* and *Doughnut* map projections which are not redeemed by their secondary descriptions – Sinusoidal Ovoid and Tangent Torus. The best of these drawings remind me of Julia Farrer's delicate works, but they are much more closely linked to non-visual disciplines. Perhaps that is why they are less beautiful. Denes's Rice/Tree/Burial project carried out in the Artpark near Niagara Falls suffers the liabilities of much Land Art. It can seem, at least to a farmer's daughter, hopelessly indulgent. The photographic illustrations provided and Denes's own poems do not rectify this impression. I suspect her project was more of an event than the more stately works of Robert Smithson or Richard Long and for that reason harder to record.

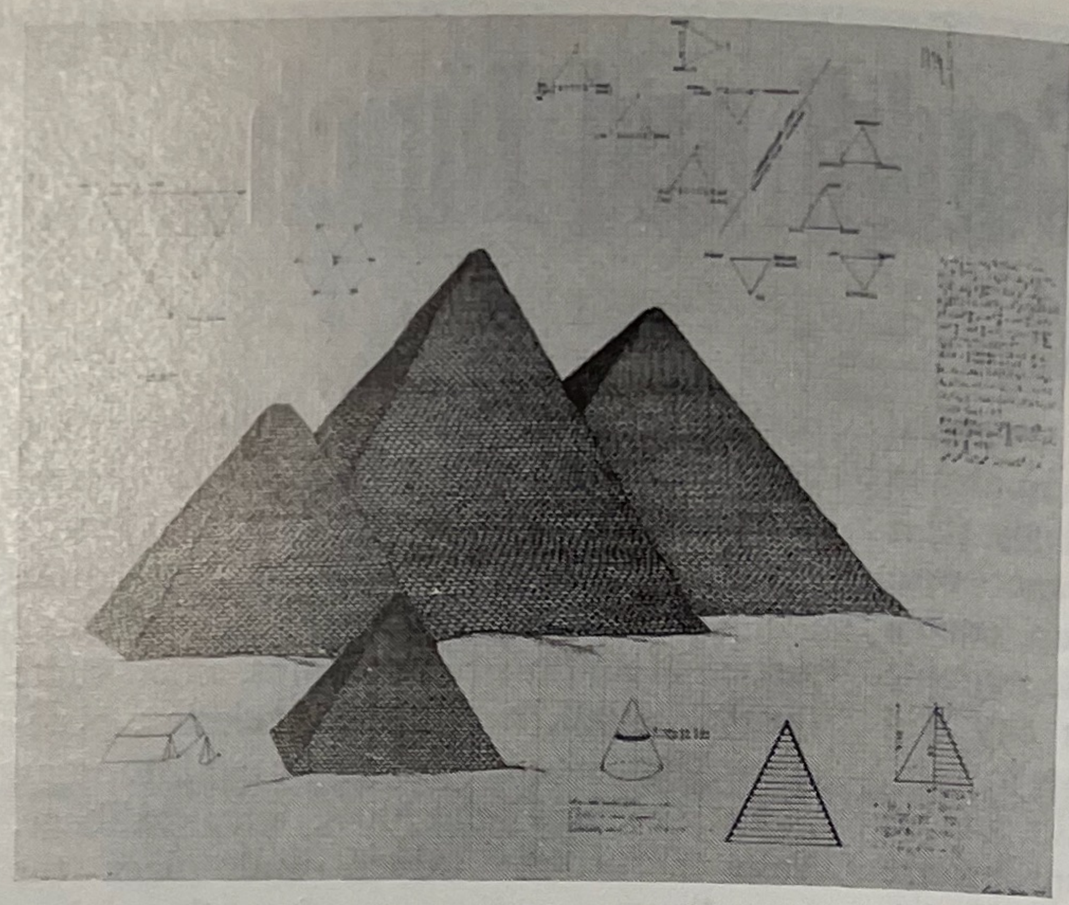
Denes has left a questionnaire to be filled in by visitors to her show. There are some mighty posers like: 'What do you consider mankind's most important achievement?' The form filler is allowed a few lines in which to set down his or her answers. Not enough space to reply. Perhaps that is the problem. There is not enough space in which to reply. Tanya Ledger

Black & Blue & Silver *The Midland Group, Nottingham* This is an open colour-based craft exhibition selected by Michael Casson, Pierre Degen, Frank Egerton, Thomas Pannell and Ann Sutton. It is an interesting display of work, unusual pottery, tapestries, rugs and compositions in mixed media ranging from painted pebbles by Irene Jones to sets of framed spotted bow ties by Julia Ford. The *Sea* tapestry by Eiko Cunningham is an intricate design, with white foam of breaking waves interspersed between deep blue, sea green and grey, and throughout textures are varied. It is a masterful achievement. Mary Farmer's woven rug is an enjoyable simple abstract composition in five colours, from black to purple, blue and grey. I admired Tobias Harrison's thrown and modelled earthenware jug and pot with lustre, for their silver-blue shiny glaze, edged with silver and gold gave a handsome rich feeling, an effect so often neglected in contemporary pottery. Designs in silver by Anthony Hawksley, Richard Fox, Robert Tasher and Gaynor Adams are unusual and highly competent. Other exhibits include painted wooden acrobats, a Noah's Art jig-saw puzzle and a set of animals by Diane Collett and Margaret Robson, cushions by Susan Mauls and Rosalind Floyd and padded silk jackets by Penny Hadrill.

Annabel Terry-Engell

British Book Illustrators 1860-1900, A Bibliography *Birmingham Bookshop* The Birmingham Bookshop has recently formed a publishing company which is to specialise in art reference books. Its first offering, a bibliography of British book illustrators from 1860 to 1960 at £16.00 does not claim to be comprehensive and the editor, Charles Baker, intends to bring out a companion volume at some future date. While it is marred by some minor typographical errors this well illustrated bibliography is a pioneering work. It is described as 'an attempt to classify the first editions of Books by Illustrator' – something which has only partially been achieved by catalogues in libraries, whose policies were formulated before the growth of interest in Victorian book illustration and which for that reason contain many fine works buried in their stacks. Charles Baker's bibliography, informed by his role as a book dealer, and perhaps because of its unselective nature, will form a useful tool for the researcher. Tanya Ledger

Marjorie Holland *Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance* This artist creates works which are now almost abstract, building up central images with a trace of formality in the manner of say De Stael or Viera da Silva, from her experiences in Cornwall, Brittany and Plymouth – natural and urban landscape. They convey elusive hints of coast, moors, stone-walls and field patterns – sometimes in the glow of sunset; mysterious and beautifully understated. Often using a curved top to the design they suggest, ancient stone crosses or the interior of romanesque churches or mines. She seems to find underlying traces of another reality – they are, in fact, interior landscapes. Hypersensitive to the visionary gleam, she carefully makes her translucent washes tell, balancing out crisp and soft edges. The best, I feel, are *December Hill, Botallack, Pink Appearing* and *Bocage*. After all the normal, traditional approaches they show how this fragile medium can be used in an original way. John Dalton



Mr. Henry and Mr. Hornel in Japan *Glasgow Art Gallery* George Henry (1858?-1920) and E. A. Hornel (1864-1933), leading members of a group who were to become known as the Glasgow Boys, went off together to Japan in the year 1893 and stayed there for 18 months bringing back drawings and paintings which tell us remarkably little about a country only then beginning to open up to Western influence. 'Mr. Henry and Mr. Hornel in Japan', Scottish Arts Council exhibition now at Glasgow Art Gallery and going on tour in the New Year to reach London in early summer, bears out what has often been suspected, that the visit did neither man's work very much good. Hornel had already created his 'Japanese style' which was, in fact, two-thirds Monticelli before he left Scotland; the visit seems to have confirmed him in the practice of heavily impastoed pigment and luscious bright colour from which he never wavered.

Henry, the more gifted painter, less concerned with recipes, and more responsive to the character of whatever he was painting (who had, moreover, achieved a near-masterpiece in the sophisticated structure of his *Galloway Landscape* of 1889), might have been expected to bring back an interesting record as well as absorbing the experience at a deeper artistic level. As it turned out, he came back with very little and encouraged in a facility which was useful to the professional portrait painter. The fine talent had begun to go to seed. Among the good Hornels is a small oil from a private collection, *Japanese Lantern Makers*, which is a nice blend of the realistic and exotic – a sketch or unfinished work without the customary relentlessly bright impastoed pigment. Of the Henrys, I would pick an oil and a watercolour – *A Geisha Girl*, half-length figure looking gravely over the top of her fan in greyed flesh tints and tones of chocolate, bottle green and dull gold, and *A Geisha Dancing*, light in hue though not over bright, which catches so well the grace and precision of the dancer's movements. Martin Baillie

Above left, Pyramid Series – 4000 B.C. Right, Isometric Systems in Isotropic Space – Map Projections The Egg (Sinusoidal Ovoid) ink and charcoal on graph paper and mylar, 1974, both by Agnes Denes, Ikon